

Rain of death*

A Briefer on the Ban Aerial Spraying Campaign



Aerial spraying is a way of applying pesticides to agricultural crops using aircrafts.

In the Philippines, export Cavendish banana plantations has been using this practice to kill the Sigatoka fungus since the 1970s. Aerial spraying allows the plantations to spray more of their bananas in lesser time.

Aerial spraying, however, showers down poison indiscriminately from the skies hitting not only the target pest but also anything human or non-human within the range of the toxic fallout.

Studies have shown that the toxic drift reaches 3.2 kilometers on the average.

Communities within and around these plantations complain of the nuisance aerial spraying brings to their lives. It is rain they try to but cannot actually hide from. It is unwanted. Worse, being drenched and hit by the toxic drift makes them suffer various ailments, from skin infections to respiratory illnesses, nausea, blindness and a host of other ailments including goiter, neuro-developmental delays in children and various forms of cancer. People's water resources get sprayed and contaminated. Livestock get sick and die. Non-banana crops like lanzones, coconut and durian trees die.

Due to its effects on people's health, environment and livelihoods, there is a strong clamor to ban aerial spraying in the Philippines. This call is led by the Mamamayan Ayaw sa Aerial Spraying (MAAS) composed of aerial spray affected villagers in Davao City, Davao del Sur, Davao del Norte and Compostela Valley and supported by the coalition National Task Force Against Aerial Spraying (NTFAAS).

Viable alternatives

Instead of aerial spraying, plantations could utilize various ground spraying methods such as truck mounted or manual spraying. While the long-term goal is to do away with pesticides altogether and to go organic, ground spraying with other mitigating measures, lessen the toxic drift and protect more people and the environment from pesticide contamination.

Health and environment hazard

The ill effects of pesticides and aerial spraying have been well documented and researched in numerous international and local studies.

The Department of Health released in May 2009 the study Health and Environmental Assessment of Sitio Camocaan, Hagonoy, Davao del Sur that found majority of the villagers beside a banana plantation exposed to aerial spray and would get sick because of it. Pesticide was detected in the villagers' blood and in air and soil samples confirming pesticide contamination beyond agricultural plantation boundaries. The study recommended the banning of aerial spray and further recommended the shift to organic agriculture practice.

People vs. greed

GOING BANANAS

The Philippines is second to Ecuador in exporting Cavendish bananas generating export earnings of US\$333M annually*. These bananas are exported to 32 countries in Asia and the Middle East. Close to 50,000 hectares are devoted to Cavendish bananas. A large majority of these plantations are aerially sprayed to minimize labor cost and to maximize profit. The national government continues to promote the expansion of Cavendish bananas to cater to a growing export market.

The plantation companies under the umbrella of the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association** supported by Croplife International*** are vigorously opposing a ban on aerial spray despite clear, viable and less dangerous alternatives to the practice because converting to ground spraying would entail more cost to their operations.

* DA Presentation to the Conference Agribusiness Plantations: Changing Mindanao's Landscape, 21 April 2005, MTRC Davao City

** Members of PBGEA include AMS Group of Companies, Inc, Sumifru Philippines, ANFLO Group of Companies, Alip River Development and Export Corporation, Del Monte Fresh Produce Philippines, La Frutera Incorporated, Lapanday Foods Corporation, Hijo Resources Corporation, Diamond Farms Inc, Dizon Group of Companies, Marsman-Drysdale Group of Companies, Nader and Ebrahim Hassan Philippines, Sarangani Agricultural Company Inc, Nova Vista Management and Development Corporation, Dole Stanfilco and Tristar Group of Banana Companies

*** Members of Croplife: BASF, Bayer Cropscience, Dow Agrosciences, Dupont, FMC, Monsanto, Syngenta, Sumitomo

* The landmark book Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, released in 1962 describes aerial spraying as "an amazing rain of death".

In response to public clamor, and absent the appropriate intervention of concerned national government agencies, the provincial government of Bukidnon banned aerial spraying way back 2001. The province of North Cotabato also banned the practice in 2004, and the Davao City government likewise passed an ordinance in 2007 banning aerial spraying as an agricultural practice. In spite of the provincial bans, Cavendish banana plantations exist and thrive in Bukidnon and North Cotabato, proving that plantations can thrive because there are viable alternatives to aerial spraying.

The Davao City ordinance is being questioned in courts by plantation companies because the ordinance supposedly violates the companies' right to property.

In Congress, there are pending bills authored by Senator Miguel Zubiri and Rep. Rufus Rodriguez to stop aerial spraying in the entire country.

Because of the long clamor to ban aerial spray and the continuous inaction of national government agencies, the representatives of MAAS are in Manila now to press government action on this urgent issue.

Global call

The clamor to ban aerial spraying of pesticides is a worldwide trend – in Ecuador, Alaska, Maine and California (USA), Victoria (Canada), New Zealand, India. Aerial spraying is prohibited in the entire European Union EU.

Right to life, health and a healthful ecology vs. corporate greed







Aerial spraying is still being practiced in the Philippines by Cavendish banana plantations with no existing national policy to speak of to protect the people from its ill effects. While the Fertilizer and Pesticides Authority claim to have regulations on it, these are routinely ignored at best with government incapable of policing the practice. Banana plantation companies claim that aerial spraying maximizes their efficiency to apply pesticide on their banana, thereby increasing their profits.

Meanwhile the right to life, health and a healthful ecology are basic human rights enshrined in the Philippine Constitution and protected by various national laws. The Philippines is also a signatory to International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and therefore duty-bound under international law to protect the rights of citizens sprayed by poison.

Our calls

Aerial spraying is not just an issue of those living within the vicinity of banana plantations. It is everyone's concern. Once the **air** and **water** are **contaminated** everyone will suffer the adverse effects of pesticide found in the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food that we eat. When the human right of one person is compromised, everyone's human rights are compromised as well.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

-  **Organize** fora, educational activities within your group or community to increase awareness on the issue.
-  **Tell** as many people about this issue through blogs, emails and texts.
-  **Barrage** the Office of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo with letters of appeal for her to issue an Executive Order banning aerial spraying in the entire Philippines:
Pres. Gloria M. Arroyo
Office of the President
Malacañang, Manila
-  Write to **PBGEA** and urge them to stop this deplorable practice in the country.
PBGEA
183 Rizal Street, Davao City, Phil.
-  **Attend/organize** prayer vigils, creative street actions to protest against aerial spraying and call for its ban in the entire Philippines
-  **Sign** the online petition at www.dirtybananas.org

It is about time that we do something about it NOW.

We call on President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to issue an Executive Order banning aerial spraying in the entire country!



Contact NTFAAS thru: Ecowaste Coalition: 441-1846 Manny or Rei
Kaisahan: 926-6042, 4330760 Murin or Mat / Saligan: 426-6124 Bobby or Aison
Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan: 426-6101 loc. 3440 Bro. Jom or Bro. Sherwin